



STAFF REPORT

Title: Policy No. 099-FN-07 – Seniors' Homeowner Rebate Policy Amendments

Meeting Date: May 24, 2022

Executive Summary:

Policy No. 099-FN-07 Seniors Rebate Program Policy was passed in 2007 to protect senior property owners from municipal tax increases.

Following review of the policy at the May 17, 2022 Corporate Priorities Committee of Council, the Committee recommended Policy No. 099-FN-07 Seniors Rebate Program Policy be brought forward with amendments to an upcoming Regular Meeting of Council for consideration.

Background:

On May 22, 2007 at a Regular Meeting of Council, Council approved Policy No. 099-FN-07 Seniors Rebate Program Policy. The intention of the policy was to protect senior property owners from municipal tax increases because low income seniors are generally unable to augment their income to correspond with increases in taxes. The stated policy purpose was to protect low income senior property owners from municipal tax increase greater than the amount paid in 2006. Since its inception however, the program has been applied with the base year being the previous year (not 2006).

The policy has not been reviewed or revised by City Council since it was passed in 2007.

The program, as it is currently set out in the policy, requires the following:

- Applies to applicants' principle address only.
- Applications are accepted prior to September 1st of the tax year applied for
- Applicants must qualify for Alberta Government Seniors Monthly Cash Benefit Program. Eligibility (as per the Government of Alberta for the program) is:
 - *be 65 years of age or older*
 - *have lived in Alberta for at least 3 months immediately before applying*
 - *be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident*
 - *receive the Old Age Security pension from the Government of Canada*
 - *meet financial eligibility criteria (as per the Govt AB website: "In general, a single senior with an annual income of \$29,285 or less, and senior couples with a combined annual income of \$47,545 or less, may be eligible for a benefit. These income levels are guidelines only, and are for seniors whose income includes full Old Age Security pension.")*



In administering the program, in addition to confirmation of the above noted criteria, administration would utilize the difference between the applicant's current tax bill and the previous year tax bill, and only provide a rebate where the current tax bill increased more than \$5 from the subsequent year.

The Seniors Rebate Program is advertised annually in the "Tax Facts" sheet that is mailed to every property owner with their tax notice; and is also available at City Hall.

In the last seven (7) years, utilization of the Seniors Rebate Program has been very low:

Program Users	
2015	4
2016	4
2017	5
2018	4
2019	1
2020	1
2021	2

From 2018 to 2021, the total payout for the program was \$754.04 from the eight (8) participants in the program. The rebates over this time period ranged from \$171.47 to \$27.31, with the average rebate being approximately \$94.00.

Administration has prepared research into what other municipalities across the province do in relation to similar, or other senior tax programs. The only community that was identified as having a municipal controlled seniors' rebate was the City of Brooks which offers a \$100 grant for seniors who are low income and receive the Alberta Senior Benefit.

City of Calgary, Edmonton, Airdrie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Leduc, Fort Saskatchewan, Lloydminster, Brooks, Lacombe, Wetaskiwin, St. Paul, County of Vermilion River, Lac La Biche County do not have their own Seniors Rebate program, however they advertise the Alberta Seniors Deferral Program, which provides a deferral (not a rebate to qualifying seniors):

- As per the Govt Alberta website: "*The Seniors Property Tax Deferral Program allows eligible senior homeowners to voluntarily defer all or part of their residential property taxes, including the education tax portion. This is done through a low-interest home equity loan with the Government of Alberta. If you qualify, Seniors Property Tax Deferral Program will pay your residential property taxes directly to your municipality on your behalf.*"



Following discussion of Policy No. 099-FN-07 Senior Rebate Program Policy by the Corporate Priorities Committee of Council on May 17, 2022, the Committee recommended the following amendments to the Policy:

- Amend the policy to change to offer a \$100 rebate to qualifying seniors instead of a varying amount (in the past the rebate was calculated individually for each applicant as the increase in municipal taxes from the previous year up to \$250).
- The qualifications for the rebate program will remain the same with the exception that there will no longer be a requirement that the tax bill increase year over year. Instead, all seniors that are eligible for the Alberta Government Seniors Monthly Cash Benefit Program and own their home (their principle residence) in the City of Cold Lake will qualify for the rebate. This is in line with the rebate program that the City of Brooks currently offers to its residents.

These changes will significantly expand the program which is currently limited to qualifying applicants where the tax bill on their principle residence is increasing. Administration is not aware of how many residents in the City of Cold Lake would meet the qualifications for this grant program. There will be future budget implications in relation to this change which will be estimated until data is available on the number of successful applicants per year.

Amendments have been made to Policy No. 099-FN-07, with updating to the wording and formatting of the policy incorporated for Council's consideration. In order to align the name of the policy with the new amendments, the policy title was amended to: Seniors' Homeowner Rebate Policy.

Alternatives:

The Council may direct:

1. That Policy No. 099-FN-07, Senior Rebate Program Policy, be amended as recommended.
2. That Policy No. 099-FN-07, Senior Rebate Program Policy, not be amended as recommended.
3. That the Report be accepted as information.

Recommended Action:

That Policy No. 099-FN-07, Senior Rebate Program Policy, be amended as recommended.



Budget Implications (Yes or No):

No

Submitted by:

Kevin Nagoya, Chief Administrative Officer